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C O N F I D E N T I A L ASMARA 000031

DEPARTMENT FOR AF/EX AND AF/E

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [PREL](#) [SU](#) [ER](#)

SUBJECT: JEM'S INTER-ETHNIC HOSTILITIES

REF: A. KHARTOUM 13

[1](#)B. KHARTOUM 75

Classified By: Ambassador Ronald K. McMullen for reason 1.4(d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: On January 1, gunmen led by ethnic Zaghawa JEM commanders fired on 32 unarmed JEM members of the Meidob ethnic group of North Darfur, according to JEM's Secretary for Legal Affairs. The attack was aimed at eliminating potential opposition to Khalil Ibrahim's retention by force of the JEM chairmanship, the senior JEM official continued, as Khalil's tenure officially ran only until January 3. This likely bodes ill for democratization of Darfur or Sudan in the event of JEM coming to power, he concluded. This cable provides a senior JEM official's take on the events described REF A. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) JEM's Secretary for Legal Affairs

Osman Wash, JEM's Secretary for Legal Affairs, is the highest ranking ethnic Meidob in JEM. He met with Emboffs January 22 at Asmara's Peacebuilding Center for the Horn of Africa to detail JEM inter-ethnic divisions and to provide his views on Khalil Ibrahim's autocratic leadership. Wash was in Ndjamena during the January 1 incident, but spoke to Meidob survivors shortly thereafter.

[1](#)3. (C) JEM's Bloody New Year's Day

Osman Wash's account of the January 1st inter-ethnic clash follows:

In late 2008 ethnic Meidob and Berti members of JEM drafted a memo to the movement's chairman complaining that the five top-ranked JEM military commanders were all Zaghawa, despite a presumed commitment to diversity. When Zaghawa-led JEM fighters attempted to disarm an outspoken group of 32 ethnic Meidob JEM members, a firefight ensued. The 32 eventually agreed to disarm, and six Meidob leaders were taken to the chairman's camp "to negotiate." The remaining 26 Meidob heard firing at the place of negotiations, and then 40 JEM gunmen, led by Commander Abdul Karim Cheloi and Deputy Commander Suleiman Sandal (both phonetic), attacked the unarmed Meidob. Many were killed, but some managed to escape and described the incident to Wash. The attack took place just inside Chad at a camp near the Ouadi Sokapa River (approximately 15.43N, 23.07E).

[1](#)4. (C) Zaghawa Domination

Wash claimed that Khalil Ibrahim's four-year term of office as JEM's chairman was set to expire January 3, and that the

chairman had no intention of calling a new JEM congress to properly extend his tenure. When the public complaint of Zaghawa over-representation jeopardized the chairman's plans to retain control by promoting his loyal kith, Khalil Ibrahim moved decisively to destroy the Meidob questioning Zaghawa domination of JEM's military hierarchy. Chadian President Debby's support of JEM, all of which is channeled through Khalil Ibrahim, Wash claimed, has empowered JEM's executive office to the detriment of the movement's other organs. Wash aims to undertake an accounting of the January 1 attack, in part to make JEM's leadership answerable to the movement, Darfuris, and the world.

15. (C) "Autocratic" Khalil Ibrahim

The JEM official was skeptical that his movement's recent military success against SLA/MM in South Darfur (REF B) would promote the Darfuri cause politically, as fighting among the Darfuri rebel groups would only divide and weaken them vis-a-vis Khartoum, he contended. Osman Wash was not optimistic about prospects for a democratic JEM leadership of Darfur or Sudan, given what he sees as Khalil Ibrahim's bloody autocratic tendencies.

16. (C) COMMENT: This message has been coordinated with Embassy Khartoum. They tell us that it is rare for a JEM official to criticize Khalil or their movement's action. Of all the rebel groups, JEM has tight control over their strategic communications, and no matter which JEM member you speak to, the line is almost always the same. END COMMENT.

MCMULLEN